

SURPRISE PARTY

i arrive at her apartment
to pick her up for the poetry reading
with two bottles of wine under my arm
since we've never been out before
i don't know what she likes.

there's an artistic young man
sitting on her couch
i know he's artistic because he doesn't even know
the rams and forty-niners are on the tube.
she introduces me to him by his first name
and i quickly open one of the bottles of wine,
but it turns out neither of them drink
so i quickly consume half the bottle
while they smoke.

then i say, "well, if you guys are ready,
i guess we ought to get started."

"oh," she says, "he's not coming;
he's going to use the time to paint."
but he says, "i think i'll take a walk
down to the beach first
to clear my head."

in the car i ask her, "who was that?"

and she says, "are you serious?
that was my husband."

i hit the brakes hard, hoping she'll
swallow her cigarette: "he doesn't mind
sending you off with me
while he sits home?"

"actually," she says, "he kind of wanted
to come along but i told him
he'd be out of place.
anyway, he trusts me
and i'd never do anything to hurt him,"
she says
sliding closer.

— Gerald Locklin

Long Beach CA